

The Man and the Times

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There is a palpable tension in the incongruity between the present times, as defined by the World Bank and expectations of social and economic democracy buttressed by the possibilities afforded by political democracy in India. The likes of the crafty Chandrababu, of whom there are quite a few in Indian politics and public life, are in search of ways of overcoming the tension to the advantage of their viewpoint. Will they succeed, and if so on what terms; if not, which of the two mutually incongruous terms will prevail are questions for the immediate future.

Do the *times*, so to speak, choose the right person, or does the right person latch on to the right *times*, is a hard question for a materialism that will not be vulgar; if it is at all necessary to use the word materialism, that is, when mere realism would perhaps suffice. (The word 'choose' is still ambiguous; it contains two meanings: that the processes let loose by the *times* shape the person suitably, or that they pick up the pre-existing person.)

That changed *times* produce changed ideas and bring persons holding the ideas to positions of dominance in the various spheres of life is a matter of common experience, and appears to demonstrate decisively the simple proposition that ideas and their dominance are determined by 'material reality'; though the simple proposition reveals itself to be rather complex when one realises that it is a sociological hypothesis rhetorically invested with the status of an epistemological truth. Whichever way one sees it, a greater complexity is revealed the moment one tries to define the changed *times* minus the changed ideas, to locate the changed reality at any point prior to the existence of ideas about it.

But from the point of view of philosophical humanism the more interesting and intriguing question is this: since it is human beings who hold ideas (there being no other mode of existence of ideas that we may know of), and they hold them more or less intelligently, what exactly, in human terms, is the process by which ideas appropriate to the *times* become dominant in the various spheres of life? The word dominance here

need not necessarily be understood in a pejorative sense. It could mean: more often believed, more widely propagated, more aggressively expressed, invested with greater authoritative truth (or, in the alternative, with greater common sense), supported more by the state or other powerful forces, or any combination of these.

If one gives up the language of reification that makes the entity called the *times* pick up the persons to suit its ideological needs, as rhetorical expression sometimes has it, there remain two answers. One is that persons with appropriate ideas (whether the ideas were there before, or they came into being in the course of the changes heralding the new *times*) gravitate to the foci of power and influence by the action of some determinate forces let loose by (or rather, that constitute) the changed *times*. The other answer would locate the subjectivity in the persons with the right ideas, who latch on to the right *times*, indeed sight them in their incipience and participate in the process of bringing them to fruition, for their own purposes, whether individual or collective, magnanimous or malign.

The two answers are in truth inseparable, though whether taken together they add up to the popular materialist dictum that *Social being determines Social consciousness* is a moot question. Indeed that seemingly illuminating expression, if taken to express an epistemological statement, is merely a tautological restatement of the basic premise of epistemological realism, that *consciousness* is nothing other than *consciousness of being*, which means that it cannot but be determined by *being*, provided one is careful enough to add the rider that this does not mean any straight forward reflection. Of course, the fundamental reformulation wrought by humanist ontology, which need not be and should not be otherwise inimical to epistemological realism, that *consciousness* is not *consciousness of being*, but *conscious being*, robs the expression of even the tautological truth. For the same reason, one can no more interpret the expression sociologically, since when both *consciousness* and *being* are but notional facets of *conscious being*, there can be no *social consciousness* separate from or subsequent to *social being* to be determined by it.

One is then left with the two-sided truth expressed by the two artificially separated processes described above. In analysing changed *times* and changed ideas, then, one has to concretely analyse the new forces that constitute the material or social (in the sense of social relations rather than human beings) aspect of the changed *times*, and the persons with suitable ideas that the forces bring or push into the foci of power; and simultaneously, the persons with suitable ideas who identify changes (mature or incipient), sometimes perhaps not changes at all but only minor possibilities, latch on to them and ride to positions of power and importance even as they help bring the changes to fruition in the same movement. In a given instance it may well be that a powerful material force such as the needs of *corporate capitalism* dominates

this two-sided process; equally, at other times, it may well be true that a dynamic group of persons, perhaps — but not necessarily — even a definable fraction of a class or some other sociological grouping, add with their strong ideas to an incipient material possibility the strength that it may not have had to become the dominant reality. Today, in the third world, the former is perhaps more true, to such an extent that it appears to lend veracity to even crude materialism, but there is no reason to believe that it must always be so. It is arguable that the latter process is a more accurate description of the initial phase of *left-leaning* or at least *welfare-leaning* policies of most third world countries, notwithstanding that this difference has been rendered obscure by reductionist analysis. But that discussion is not the present subject.

One conclusion about future prospects that one may draw from these considerations is that for a humanist perspective, there is no such thing as a stable, sure, socialist phase of history, or a post-history of humankind, distinguishable in its eternally reproduced ethos of co-operation and sharing from a pre-history of mutual predation as Marx imagined in his more extravagant moods. There will always be the possibility of evil surfacing strongly, taken along and magnified into the dominant social reality by a determined bunch of persons, or a whole identifiable social category, aggrieved for whatever reason or motivated by a desire for socially destructive choices dressed up of course in some grand rhetoric, for human beings can never be meanly mean, we must be grandly mean. That we choose, and that we may choose evil as well as good, is the fundamental human reality, in whose modification the only thing that works is the human moral sense, not an eternal moral code interior to the species, but the moral potential, which takes concrete form in and through the current civilisational morality that is embodied in the institutions and norms, the structure and the values, of that civilisation, which define, enabled and limit it. Eternal vigilance, it appears, is the price for not only liberty but socialism as well; not vigilance against an external enemy about which socialist minded people need not be told afresh for we have worked it into a paranoid trait at least since Bolshevik times, but about the human potential for evil within.

Chandrababu Naidu, the much lionised chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, was very much around before the World Bank took over the Indian economy. He was known to be an unprincipled political manipulator, otherwise described as an *able* party manager. His shifty eyes — described with accurately defamatory imagination, and subsequently retracted for that reason, as the looks of a thief at a cattle fair by his erstwhile colleague in the *Telugu Desam Party* — member of parliament Renuka

Choudhary — put off most people, but his talent at the kind of politics he chose was recognised and respected by those who respect such things. That *corporate capitalism* would at most recognise a country cousin in his cut throat ruthlessness and ability to cohabit easily with falsehood would perhaps have been conceded by an observer of those days, if at all such an observer thought of *corporate capitalism* in connection with such an unlikely creature as Babu, as Chandrababu Naidu is fondly known to such people as are fond of him, or wish to be thought so. But a country cousin is only a country cousin, and nobody in those days would have dreamt that he would become a blue-eyed boy of *corporate capitalism* one day.

His capacity to amass property at remarkable speed, otherwise described as ‘entrepreneurial ability’ or ‘business acumen’, was also known, and again respected by those who respect such things. He was after all born to a father who had but four acres of rain-fed land in a part of Rayalaseema where much of the land is rain-fed, that is when there is rain at all to feed it, but according to his own recent ‘declaration of assets’ he owns property worth Rs 4 crore now. One is at liberty to multiply that figure by such factor as appeals to one’s imagination, for he is no stickler for facts, and indeed it has been a favourite pastime of Congressmen over here ever since he made the declaration to guess at the right factor, and they have been coming up with a new number each day, more for their amusement than anybody’s edification. But even four crore from four acres of dry land in a not particularly fertile region — and that too shared among brothers — is an achievement that tells quite a lot about the man and his scruples. And yet nobody dreamt in those days that he would be talked about in the business capitals of the world, as we are told is happening now. Though, that perhaps merely shows that, influenced by the smooth and suave face of *corporate capitalism*, we do not often realise the strong affinity it has to the recognisably repulsive rural buccaneer.

He habitually speaks, whether in the assembly or outside, in the terse and preremptory tones of a village bully, accompanied by the shaking of a threatening forefinger. That is perhaps put down to unease in speaking English when he is seen on TV by outsiders, but no, it is his manner of speech, which reflects a personality trait formed perhaps quite early in his youth from his upper caste lower middle class background, which meant he was one among the boys in the village, the school or the college, not alienated and set apart as a rich one would have been, but one of the boys and a natural leader by virtue of his caste, entitled to bully the boys around. It is not that the background automatically makes one a bully, but it gives the opportunity, and some of those given the opportunity choose. The same background gives other opportunities too, and some may elect those. Moreover, the opportunity is not presented from outside but is refracted through the particular personality. We are here close to the

point where our explanation can no longer be merely social; it must necessarily also be moral and psychic. And after a while all explanation ceases and we can only record, though we can always dig a little more and try to explain a little more.

What human beings make, and what makes human beings are the two sides of the intertwined process of history. The first is observable, even if the authorship is often obscure and frequently contested, but the second can only be inferred or guessed at. All attempts to discover that which, in the first or final analysis, makes human beings, are bound to be futile because at the end it will always be qualified by the statement that firstly what makes me is refracted through the unique thing called *I*, and secondly by the fact that *I choose*. This applies not merely to external determinants such as production relations or class situation, but even the subjective determinant of productive human practice which is frequently set up as an adequate alternative to objective determinism, for it can no more completely explain human choice which belongs to the psychic and moral dimensions of human existence as much as its practical dimension. A fuller ontology and a fuller anthropology than that of human practice is needed for that. Radical thinkers appear to baulk here because it would go against the utopian hopes about human possibilities that are the mainstay of radicalism, though a fuller humanism need not militate against all hope of progress, even substantial progress.

But one can legitimately talk of influences and impacts that have effect on not only the choices we are faced with, and indeed the choices we often create for ourselves, but also our proclivity to make this choice or that. These influences are perhaps more useful to explain behaviour from hindsight than to predict anything, but even that is helpful for making sense of ourselves.

The totality of social culture embedded in the social structure is undoubtedly the strongest influence, given all the premises of an unabashed humanism. Chandrababu's father, as said already, was a poor — or let us say, a lower middle class — farmer, but he was from a dominant caste, the caste of *kammas*. The caste was powerful in the village and the region, but this family was poor and resource-less. This class-caste category of poor upper castes, especially in a rural setting that gives it a tightly knit character held together by unrepentantly medieval assumptions of worth, exhibits certain unpleasant traits all over the country: *arrogance* and *insecurity* born of unfulfilled assumptions of eminence, leading to either the *bullying type* who is a threat to the lower castes, *the sycophant* who hangs on to the rich of his caste inside and outside the village to bask in the reflected importance, *the ruthless go-getter* who tramples on all in his search for what his caste has promised but his economic status has denied, or some combination of these uniformly uninviting traits. Of course, occasionally the same milieu has produced leaders of the poor who have put the *caste-confidence* that others lack at

the service of the struggle against power that they know only too closely and are in little awe of. But, the undeniable possibility of individual choice apart, any significant tendency in that direction would perhaps require that the social culture contains a tradition defined by the idiom of justice and equality. Chandrababu's native Chittoor district is sadly lacking in such a culture. The region has not been to any significant extent affected by the communist, rationalist and reformist movements that had a salutary influence on the culture of the coastal Andhra districts to the north-east, in which it was the *kamma* peasantry that participated more vigourously than any other single caste or community; nor did Chittoor, in spite of its contiguity with the Tamil country to the south, partake to any considerable extent of the *non-brahmin* self-respect movement that had an equally salutary influence in those parts, especially on the upper *sudra* castes comparable to the *kammas* of the Telugu country.

Forsaken by social progress of either the Marxist or the Periyar-ist variety, the most likely type of poor *kamma* youth from the district was the self-confident but simultaneously insecure seeker of power and property, prone to either physical violence or manipulative ruthlessness, devoid of any sentiment of sympathy for the poor and the weak, for he has been there and has nothing but contempt for those who remain there, even if they do not have his advantage of caste, indeed precisely because the wretches are so wretched that they do not have the advantage. It is an easily recognisable type, and a type — with all the myraid individual variations not only of actual worth but also emphasis in the angularities and degrees of scruples — that just suits the needs of a very different mode of life: *Corporate capitalism*, which needs just such self-centred and unsentimental types, the more insecure under the skin the better, for the more ruthless they will then be.

But Chandrababu had still to grow up before he could be the blue-eyed boy of the corporate world. An overgrown country brat would not do. He, of course, was not at the beginning in search of a place in New York's business magazines, but only power and money in whichever form and whatever kind. Today, he is sometimes described as a computer buff; he is certainly hooked to information technology, to the point of holding the unlikely belief that investment in that area can be the locomotive for the state's growth. But until recently his life exhibited no such hi-tech proclivities. Even if he had been born rich, he would in all probability have moved into the lucrative world of civil contracts rather than information technology, and then perhaps moved to politics from there, like the average Indian rural-based politician. As he was born poor, he had neither that option nor this; he could only enter politics.

He cut his teeth in campus politics in the small town university at Tirupati, at the foothills of Lord Venkateswara. The university was (and still is) dominated by caste groupings of the dominant communities, overlaid with the proneness to factional

violence characteristic of some of the hinterland areas of the university, such as Cud-dapah district. Physical violence was not Chandrababu's forte. It pays little, and has an uncomfortably terminal character. He preferred to manoeuvre and manipulate from behind the scenes most of the time. Being a *kamma* helped him a lot. The *kammas* of Rayalaseema, unlike their cousins of the central coastal districts, have to contend with an equally strong, but numerically larger and violently inclined caste — the *Reddys*. Yet, being second to none in the *non-brahmin* hierarchy, and in their self-perception more competent in any sphere of life than any, the *kammas* of Rayalaseema see no reason why they should play second fiddle to the *reddys*. And therefore any capable leader from that community would attract following. Other *non-reddy* castes would also be inclined to follow such a leader. Both at the university and later outside the campus, Chandrababu used this advantage to the hilt. But he also used the image of an educated young man (he took an MA in Economics and apparently dabbled a bit in research of some sort before going on to higher things) as a foil to the old fogeys of the *reddy* caste who till then dominated the district's politics.

A dynamic, educated young man to some and a *kamma* leader to others, he rose fast in the politics of the district. Such of his friends as went behind him pulled by the idealism attached to the image of an educated modern young man fighting medieval fogeys cannot to this day forget the shock they received when they saw him making money from day one after he became MLA. He has never looked back after that. Some politicians are credited with some idealism in the initial years of their career, which they outgrow in due course and recall nostalgically on inebriated evenings thereafter. Chandrababu has never been accused of any such weakness.

VISION OF PROGRESS

But it cannot be said that he did not have a long-term vision for the kind of society he wanted this country to be. He did, and that is what makes him more than a *ha'penny politician*. Indeed, we would not be discussing him otherwise. That vision, predictably, was made up of notions of a high growth rate, technological modernity, unsentimental efficiency and other notions that typically hang together. He was recognisably impatient with anything that was an obstacle to this; in particular, like all persons who hold the arrogant belief that they are 'self-made', as the expression goes, he was impatient with claims of social disadvantage or structural disabilities. Such people had only themselves to blame, really.

This type, of both person and point of view, is quite familiar. It is easily attributable to capitalism, though such persons and such a point of view exist in all societies, as will

be evident if one is not taken in too much by the notion that certain classes of ideas and certain types of personalities are exclusive to certain societies. But the type is no doubt found more in societies that are capitalist in their economic structure, for that system of production encourages such a viewpoint, and persons whose personality is permeated with that viewpoint. (That ideas are not held in the mind but through the personality is one of the great truths of psychoanalysis, which makes it inescapable that any epistemological discussion is really an exploration in the anthropology of ideas, and hence also that any theory of history must be humanist if it is to even begin to be true.)

What is interesting about Indian society is the way this viewpoint has risen to ascendance in society in the last decade or so. But, in hindsight, it appears that this ascendance, as far as Andhra Pradesh is concerned, was signified at least in part by the rise of the *Telugu Desam Party* (TDP). Impatience with the emphasis on welfare and concern for the disadvantaged that early on characterised the Indian polity shaped by the expectations of the social and political churning that we call the *freedom struggle*, is an attitude that has been hardening over the years in Indian society. The more that the hitherto disadvantaged assert themselves and demand changes in society, policy and the law, the more the resentment grows, and the more the impatience for jettisoning it grows. Much of recent Indian political history can be interpreted within these terms. The theoretical crisis of socialism and the downfall of the states called *socialist* has further philosophically emboldened this impatience, as much as the fact that the economic policies of yore found it difficult to cross a certain limit of growth.

It is not that there was no space within the Congress Party for this impatience; there was plenty. But a certain inertia is inevitable in any organisation as old as the Congress, and moreover there were too many in that party who had made a political career of representing the disadvantaged. Those who were impatient for change were too impatient to wait. Later in the day, the rise to popularity of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* would signify the same change on a larger and much more destructive scale, but as far as Andhra Pradesh is concerned, it began as far back as 1982, with the birth of the TDP. The fact was most clearly represented by *Eenadu*, the daily newspaper that truly represents the ethos of the social sections whose impatience led to the formation of the TDP. Chandrababu, the manager (formally known as general secretary) of the party after he got over his initial hesitation and joined his father-in-law's party (he was already a Congress minister by the time N T Rama Rao set up the TDP) also shared the ethos, though he did not let anyone perceive him as anything other than a (very able) party manager, not even letting people see his political ambition, until he decided to take charge of the party to save it from its founder who, in his estimate, had turned senile. But even at this stage the time was not thought ripe to come out, with the

no-holds-barred philosophy of glorification of *corporate capitalism*, and denigration of welfarist responsibilities of the state that characterise the policy dimension of the Indian Constitution as much as popular expectations.

The paradoxical situation of this section of society was that they needed a charismatic leader to put their interests in power, but wanted the leader to eschew the 'populism' — wasteful and inefficient — that gave him the charisma, and be a hard-headed businessman-chief minister, of the type that Chandrababu now proudly declares himself to be. Such perfection not being attainable by mere human beings, they perforce had to put up with N T Rama Rao, his populism (grandiose self-image of a benevolent provider, in truth) and all. However, the growing impatience of *Eenadu* — the mouth-piece of this viewpoint — with the antics of N T Rama Rao, even as it steadfastly supported him against the Congress, reflects the tension inherent in this paradox quite well.

It is needless to go into the details of the methods by which this paradox was sought to be resolved, and the role played in this by matters like N T Rama Rao's infatuation with his second wife. (It is not clear that one can describe these matters as incidental or contingent, for that may be a hasty and untenable rationalisation of the change.) What played a crucial role in the removal of the inefficient drag on the economy — deadwood literally — that the founder's ego-centric self-image as the grand provider of succour to the masses was by now perceived to have become, not only by the Family but by the crucial support base and international policy prescribers as well, was the bold decision of Chandrababu to step in as the replacement, to be the *man of the times*. The *state shall not be the provider but only a facilitator*, says the current ruling dogma. To realise itself, the dogma had to await the arrival of a determined *facilitator* to replace the *grand provider*. The *times* had to wait for the *man*. The *man* with a personality shaped in an appropriate milieu, imbued with appropriate values to guide his choices, and the right kind of personal scruples or the lack thereof.

That is now in the past. The supporters, the advisors and the prescribers are all vocally delighted with the replacement of the charismatic but unwanted populism of the founder of the party with the hard headed pragmatism of his son-in-law who has assumed the electorally risky self-image of an unsentimental corporate executive. The transformation has evoked expressions of an almost childlike glee from the executives of the World Bank and the likes of Bill Gates. And also, one is told, the business organisations and magazines that belong there. Chandrababu knows this, and never tires of declaring that he is nothing but an efficient manager of the affairs of the state in the manner of a company executive. That is not what the people expect from an elected government in this country, nor what the Constitution says it should be, but then the *times* we live in have little respect for such backward notions. What remains

to be seen is whether Chandrababu will turn out to have been in truth the *dupe* of the *times*. For India, luckily for the people, is still a democracy, whatever its considerable warts, and you cannot be the *man* of the *times* unless you get enough votes. There are, of course, numerous ways of managing votes, and Chandrababu knows all of them. He has indeed been a professional in the matter for many years, now aided by computers. But elections still have a way of taking the most crafty by surprise. It is not that there is some superior wisdom in the 'people' as editorial writers invariably say at the end of each election, in wholesale expiation of everybody's sins, but various dissatisfactions and expectations in society add up often to a sum not bargained for by the most perfidious manager of elections, notwithstanding all the money, the liquor and the physical threats expended.

Chandrababu, however, is not unaware of this. He knows there is much he has to compensate for in the matter of lost popularity. Relaxation of prohibition on Indian Made Foreign Liquor, reduction in the subsidy given to the cheap rice scheme and power supplied to farmers, and a ruthlessly determined closure of a number of loss-making public sector and cooperative sector industries, unmindful of viable proposals of revival, have certainly earned the resentment of a sizeable section of the population. One cannot, however, add up the numbers and debit the votes, because the argument that the schemes meant for the welfare of a few have rendered the economy bankrupt wins by playing upon common human feelings of guilt, and has been used with considerable success by dint of tireless insistence by governmental spokesmen as well as editorial writers in newspapers; and in any case there is a tendency among the people to see welfare, not as the rightful due of those who are rendered disadvantaged by unequal social and economic conditions, but as munificence, transient as all charity. It has been repeatedly said, and dinned into the minds of the beneficiaries, that welfare schemes are concessions given to the unreasonable blackmail of the underprivileged, against the common sense of economic reason. The guilt thus induced is the surest weapon against any opposition to the withdrawal of welfare. But all said and done, the fear of reduced popularity is there in Chandrababu's mind. That has set him on the search for a public image pleasing to the voters.

He is indulging in a series of activities and policies to this end that are meant to generate popularity, but are distinguished from the populism that politicians of his father-in-law's generation were accustomed to. It is not just that he needs to restore his popularity after having started the dismantling of welfare schemes. There is a bigger need of the *times* involved, and that is what makes it relevant to our purpose: how does the leader in the image of a corporate executive establish hold on popular imagination? To abide by the farmework set by the dogma that the '*state should be facilitator and not provider*', and at the same time overcome the handicap of invisibility

that a mere *facilitator* would suffer from, which could be fatal in the electoral arena, Chandrababu has proposed the model of an *activist facilitator*. It is described as *taking governance to the people*, but it is more of taking himself, or rather his image, to the people. Taking governance to the people can only mean greater decentralisation of governance, but what Chandrababu is doing in fact is in a sense greater centralisation, for his brand of *administrative activism* concentrates the image of governance in one person — himself. If taking governance to the people is what he actually wanted, the least he could have done is to give honest expression to the spirit of the 73 and 74 Constitution amendments. But his programmes, on the contrary, barring only the water users associations set up by statute and empowered to participate in the management of local irrigation systems, side-step the local bodies completely and set up the chief minister and his party at the centre.

His partymen are also making a lot of money in the process, because Chandrababu's *activist governance* has involved giving rural works contracts under the *Janmabhoomi* programme on an informal basis — on the plea of encouraging the 'people' to undertake their own development — but while Congressmen are crying hoarse about this because it affects their own money-making opportunities, what is more significant about the exercise is the search being made by Chandrababu for a vote-gathering replacement, suitable to the changed *times*, for that much derided thing called 'populism'. That may come in use to Congressmen, too, in the days to come.

There is nothing *per se* wrong in the government encouraging *self-help*. If the chief minister wishes to go around encouraging the people to clean their streets and repair the damaged compound wall of the *gram panchayat* office or village school, himself holding a helpful broom or spade till the TV cameras leave; or if, as in the *Janmabhoomi* programme, villagers are encouraged to pool resources for local works to the tune of 50 per cent of the cost in the case of small works, and 30 per cent in the case of big works, with the government undertaking to supply the remainder; there is no reason to carp about it merely because it may make Chandrababu more popular, or merely because in some places, in the guise of the "people's contribution", some local TDP contractor comes forward and puts up the "people's share" and makes a neat profit out of the whole thing. The criticism of all the political formations in the state, from the Congress to the extreme left, that all this is a popularity gimmick, is besides the point. Being in politics, he wants to be popular, like all of them. And so long as he does not do positively harmful things for becoming popular — such as pulling down other people's places of worship — there is no point in carping about the desire for popularity as such. A truer criticism would be that the activities are actually resulting in greater centralisation of governance; and a truer warning to the people would be that this activity is intended as a substitute for the welfare responsibilities of the

state, which are being gradually given up as a matter of policy. It is not that whatever benefit or use the people get from Chandrababu's schemes is necessarily illusory or only beneficial to the rich. That is not the case. It is that welfare — however meagre — has always meant at least a minimal redistribution of resources. *Facilitation*, even the *activist facilitation* of Chandrababu, means on the other hand help rendered on the basis of the existing distribution of resources whose inviolability is the holy cow of today's ruling development philosophy. Since the welfare structure is not yet totally disbanded, this distinction is not yet apparent, but it will soon be. It is not the case that such a facilitation on the basis of existing distribution of resources benefits only the well to do. That too is not the case, and therefore such facilitation need not at all be uniformly unpopular. Nevertheless there is a qualitative difference in the change of emphasis from welfare as some minimal redistribution of resources to *facilitation* as help given on the basis of whatever resources you have.

For instance, if there are irrigation sources in your village and you are a user (not necessarily a big user), you can participate in their management through the water users association; but if you have no irrigation water available for your use and you wish to sink a borewell so that you may turn your dry strip into wet land, but are too poor to pay the electricity charges at full cost and therefore expect the government to supply electricity cheap, then the answer you get is: nothing doing. The fact that in the last few decades irrigation in Andhra Pradesh has grown mainly because of well water expansion aided by cheap power, and that this has given two square meals a day and perhaps a little besides to lakhs of lower middle class farming families in the Telangana and Rayalaseema regions (precisely the kind of families that Chandrababu's used to be about four or even three decades ago), and that not only is the new power policy that *the user pays all* going to put an abrupt end to this expansion, but there may in fact be a retardation, with wet lands going dry because many present users cannot afford to pay the full cost charges, is evidently a matter of no concern to the prescribers of policy. This is not an argument for endless supply of very cheap power to all rural users. There could be a gradation of prices. But a general philosophical assumption that resources will be efficiently utilised only when the user pays the cost is a different thing altogether.

Notwithstanding the difference, Chandrababu is gambling on whatever popularity the *facilitative activism* is likely to bring him. Another gambit he is boldly trying out is to contrast his own seeming dynamism in hopping from village to village and town to town inspecting the dusty insides of dilapidated revenue record rooms or testing the strength of a tank bund that probably last saw repair before the sun set on the British empire, with the proverbial inertia of civil servants. The gambit has made him unpopular with civil servants, but quite popular with the people. Most of

his programmes involve the officials visiting villages in the company of MLAs and ministers and holding themselves open to complaints and questions from the people in the censorious presence of the legislators who successfully act as if they are in no way responsible for the state of affairs. This is one sure way of becoming popular in a country like India where the average civil servant is rarely available even for supplication, let alone complaint or criticism. This is perhaps one thing Chandrababu has learnt from his father-in-law who put to the best populist use the resentment common people have for the officialdom. He managed to make people forget that politicians are as much responsible for the kind of civil service we have in the country. And the son-in-law has taken the cue quite well.

There is palpable tension in the incongruity between the present *times* as defined by the World Bank and other policy prescribers for the third world, and expectations of social and economic democracy buttressed by the possibilities afforded by political democracy in India. The likes of the crafty Chandrababu, of whom there are quite a few in Indian politics and public life, are on the search for ways of overcoming the tension to the advantage of their viewpoint. Will they succeed, and if so on what terms, with what sort of a redefinition of democracy; and if not, which of the two mutually incongruous terms will prevail to what extent, or what kind of a cancerous body politic will be left behind, are questions for the immediate future. Not questions for contemplation, but positive action.